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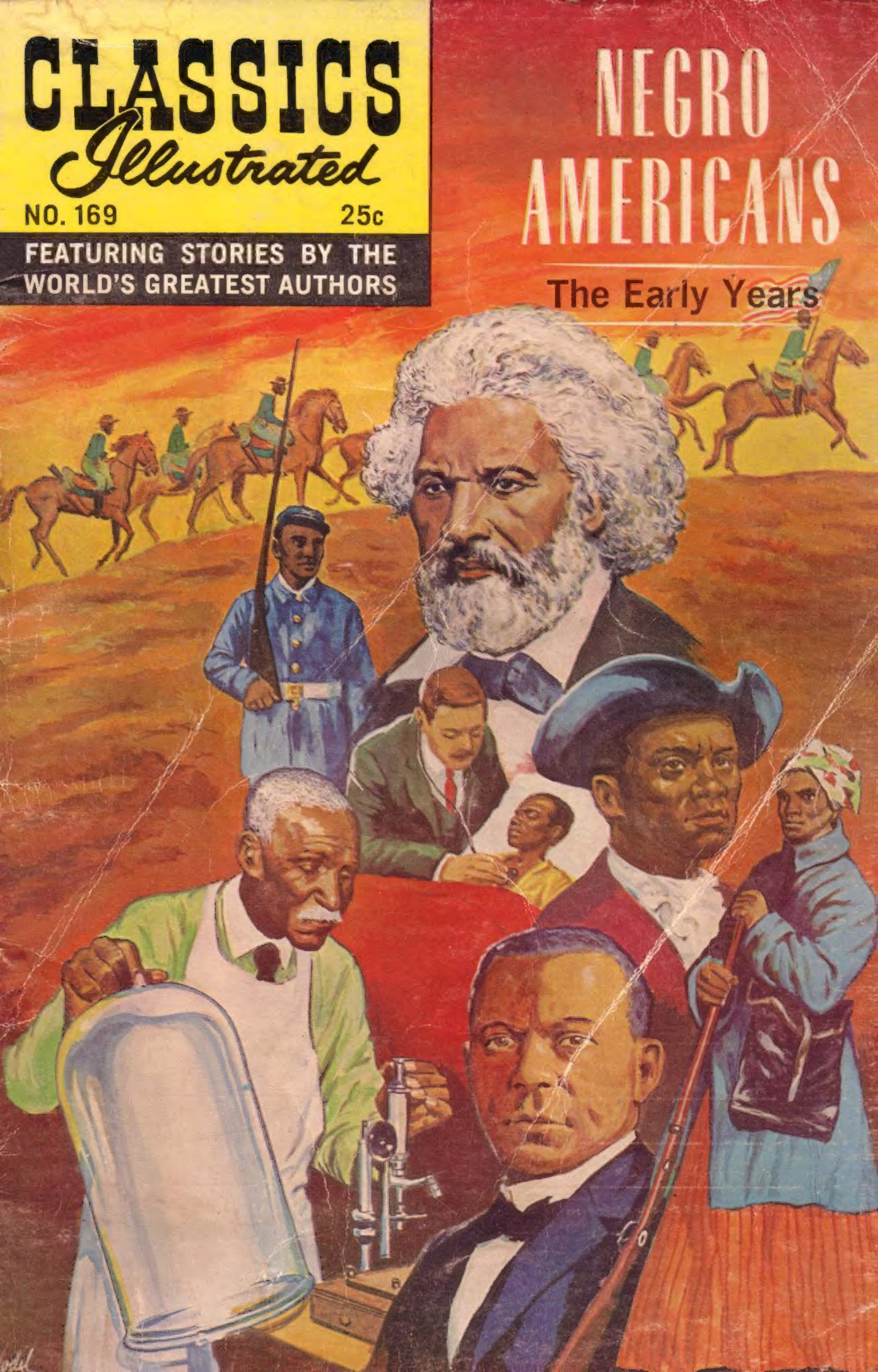
NEGRO AMERICANS

The Early Years



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NEGRO AMERICANS
The Early Years

By calling this book "Negro Americans—The Early Years," we try to give accurate accounts of some of those black men and women who gave their talents and lives to their country during its formative years.

Space allows us to show only a few of these black heroes. Many others served as great leaders, spokesmen and innovators during the span of "the early years." The efforts and triumphs of all these black men and women live as their legacy to American heritage.

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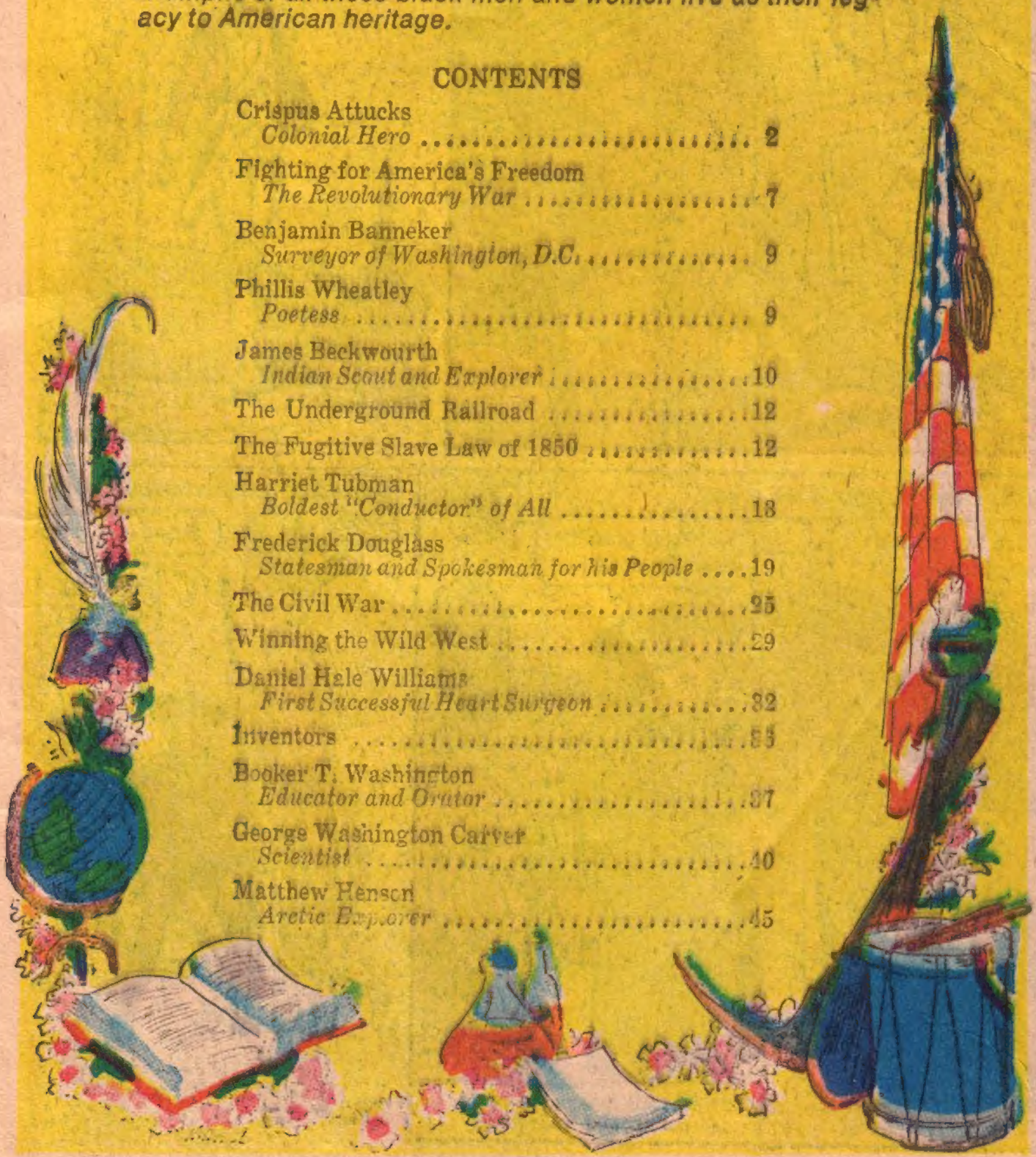


CRISPUS ATTUCKS

1770–The air in Boston was tense. Afraid of losing their American colonies, the British had camped troops in the town. Fist fights had broken out between citizens and soldiers. Bostonians wanted the troops to leave, but the British would not go.

History tells little about Crispus Attucks. He may have been a runaway slave who went to sea on a whaling ship.

On March 5, 1770 . . .

Citizens were walking in the streets.

* British soldiers wore red coats and were called "redcoats."

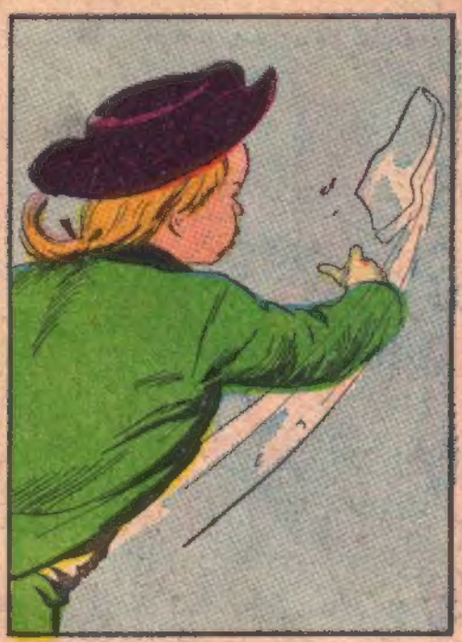
Some boys gathered around the Sentry.

Suddenly . . .

An angry crowd gathered. Crispus Attucks raced to the front and shouted at the soldiers to come out of their barracks.

Bells were ringing all over Boston. The frightened Sentry ran to warn Captain Preston at the Main Guard house.
The Colonials*— they're coming!
*Americans were called "Colonials."
Preston and his men charged out of the Guard house and ran to stop the Colonials.
The redcoats charged down King Street.
Here they come, men!

The British had been ordered not to fire.
Rush on!
Get them!



A shot rang out— Attucks was killed.

Thinking the first shot was a signal to shoot, the soldiers fired into the crowd.

When the smoke cleared . . .
The Bostonians were furious at this "Boston Massacre*". They demanded that the soldiers be brought to trial. 13 soldiers were tried for the murders of Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell, and Patrick Carr. Then the troops were pulled out of Boston.
* brutal murder
Attucks' body lay in Faneuil Hall. Thousands came to honor him.
Today, a monument stands in Boston Common in memory of the brave men who died at the "Boston Massacre."

FIGHTING FOR AMERICA'S FREEDOM

On April 19, 1775, "the shot heard round the world" rang out. The Revolutionary War began. Over 5,000 black men fought alongside whites during the long years of battle which were to create a new nation.

JUNE 5, 1775

At the famous Battle of Bunker Hill, Peter Salem, a Negro, shot Major Pitcairn, a leader of the British troops. Another Negro patriot, Salem Poor, fought so bravely that he was commended to Congress.

1775

Prince Hall of Boston met with General George Washington and the Committee on Safety to ask for permission to recruit black slaves for the Army. Prince Hall enlisted. He was also the first black man to join the Masonic Order of America. In 1787, Prince Hall asked the city of Boston to open a school for Negro children. The school was opened in 1796.

DECEMBER, 1776

Washington crossed the Delaware. At least two men in his special force, Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell, were Negro. Whipple was in Washington's own boat.

WINTER, 1777

Black men froze at Valley Forge with Washington's army.

JULY, 1781—SPY JAMES

James, born a slave in Virginia, became one of Lafayette's most trusted spies for the American cause. Lafayette wanted to know what British General Cornwallis' plans were, so James entered the British camp to spy. His information led to a victory for American troops.

1782—1783

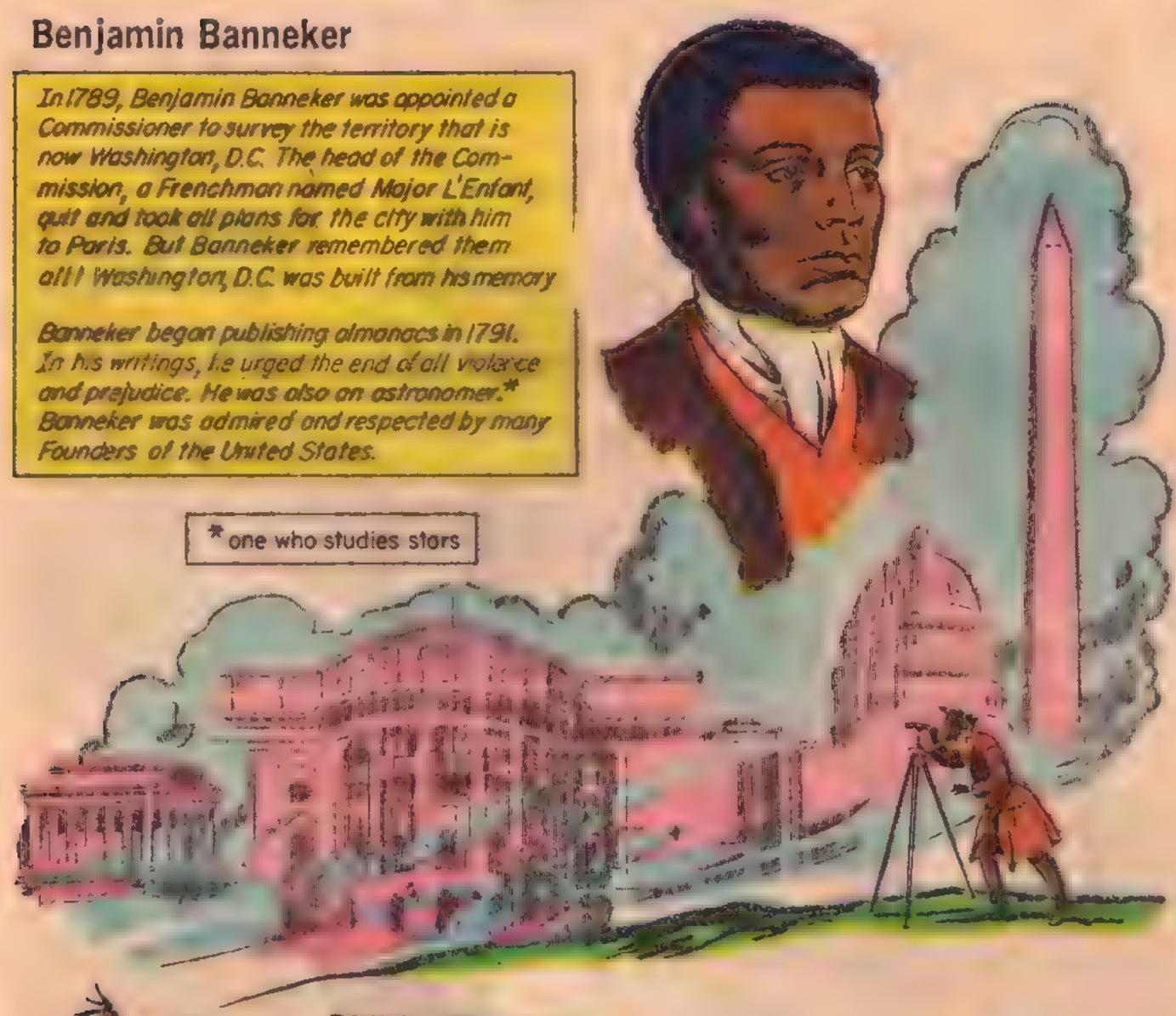
Deborah Gannett, disguised as a man, served as a soldier in the American Army for more than 17 months. She was honored for her bravery.

Benjamin Banneker

In 1789, Benjamin Banneker was appointed a Commissioner to survey the territory that is now Washington, D.C. The head of the Commission, a Frenchman named Major L'Enfant, quit and took all plans for the city with him to Paris. But Banneker remembered them all! Washington, D.C. was built from his memory.

Banneker began publishing almanacs in 1791. In his writings, he urged the end of all violence and prejudice. He was also an astronomer. Banneker was admired and respected by many Founders of the United States.*

* one who studies stars

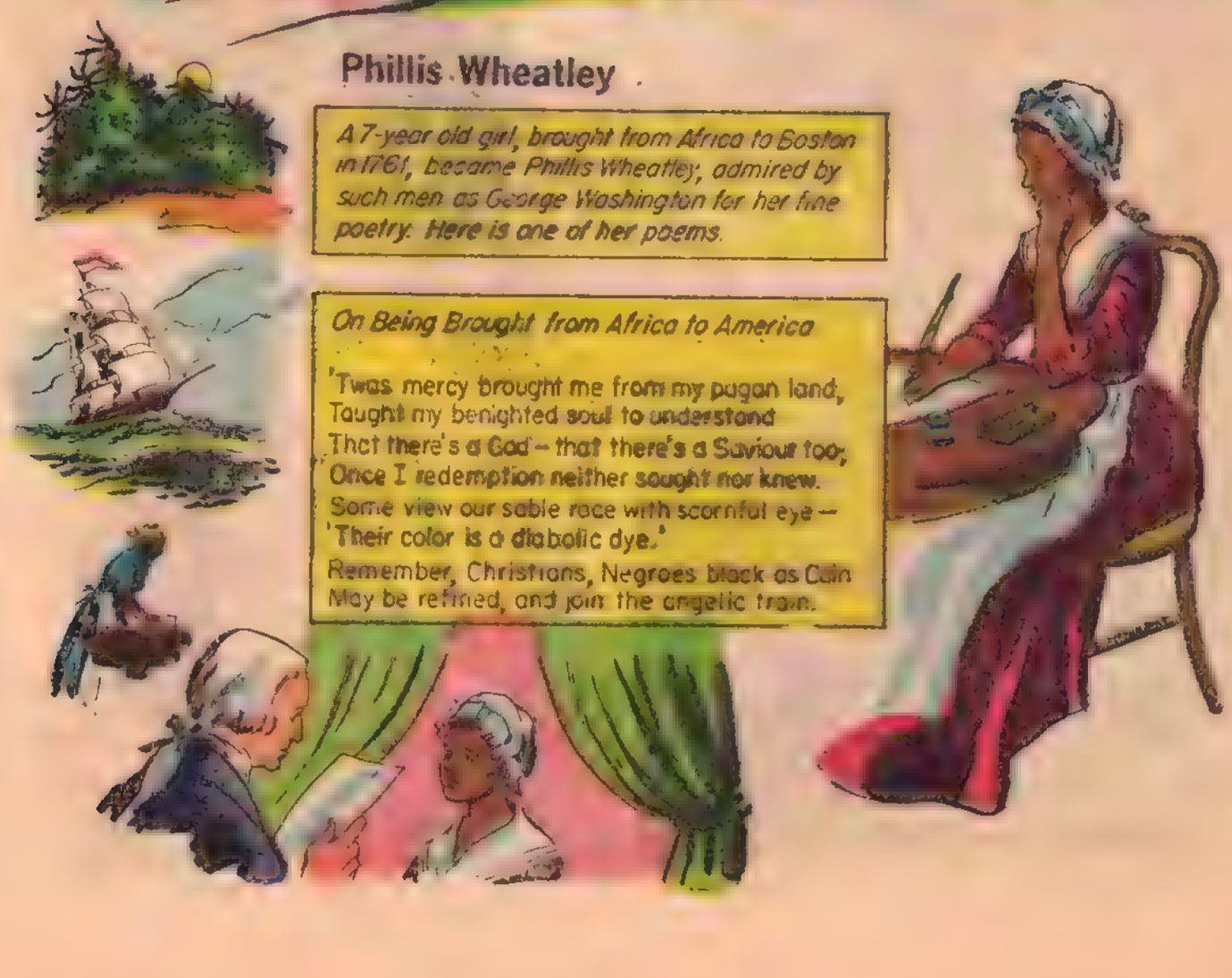


Phillis Wheatley

A 7-year old girl, brought from Africa to Boston in 1761, became Phillis Wheatley, admired by such men as George Washington for her fine poetry. Here is one of her poems.

On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God – that there's a Saviour too;
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye –
'Their color is a diabolic dye.'
Remember, Christians, Negroes black as Cain
May be refined, and join the angelic train.



JAMES BECKWOURTH

Indian scout, explorer and hunter, James Beckwourth was born in Virginia in 1798.

In 1805, his family moved to Missouri. Settlers were always afraid of Indian attacks.

In 1820, Beckwourth joined Gen. Ashley's Rocky Mountain Fur Company as a scout and hunter.

He was known for his skill and courage.

Around 1826, trouble with the Blackfeet * began. One day, while looking for stolen horses . . .

* an Indian tribe known as fierce warriors

He was chased many miles to camp.

Later, he met some Crow Indians*, who made him their chief.

* The Crows were a more peaceful tribe.

Beckwourth lived with the Crows for 12 years. Then he returned to St. Louis. In the years that followed, he roamed the West, and gained fame for . . .

trading . . . exploring . . .

prospecting.

He found a new pass to California through the mountains. It was named "Beckwourth's Pass."

In 1852, he settled in "Beckwourth's Valley" and set up an inn and trading post.

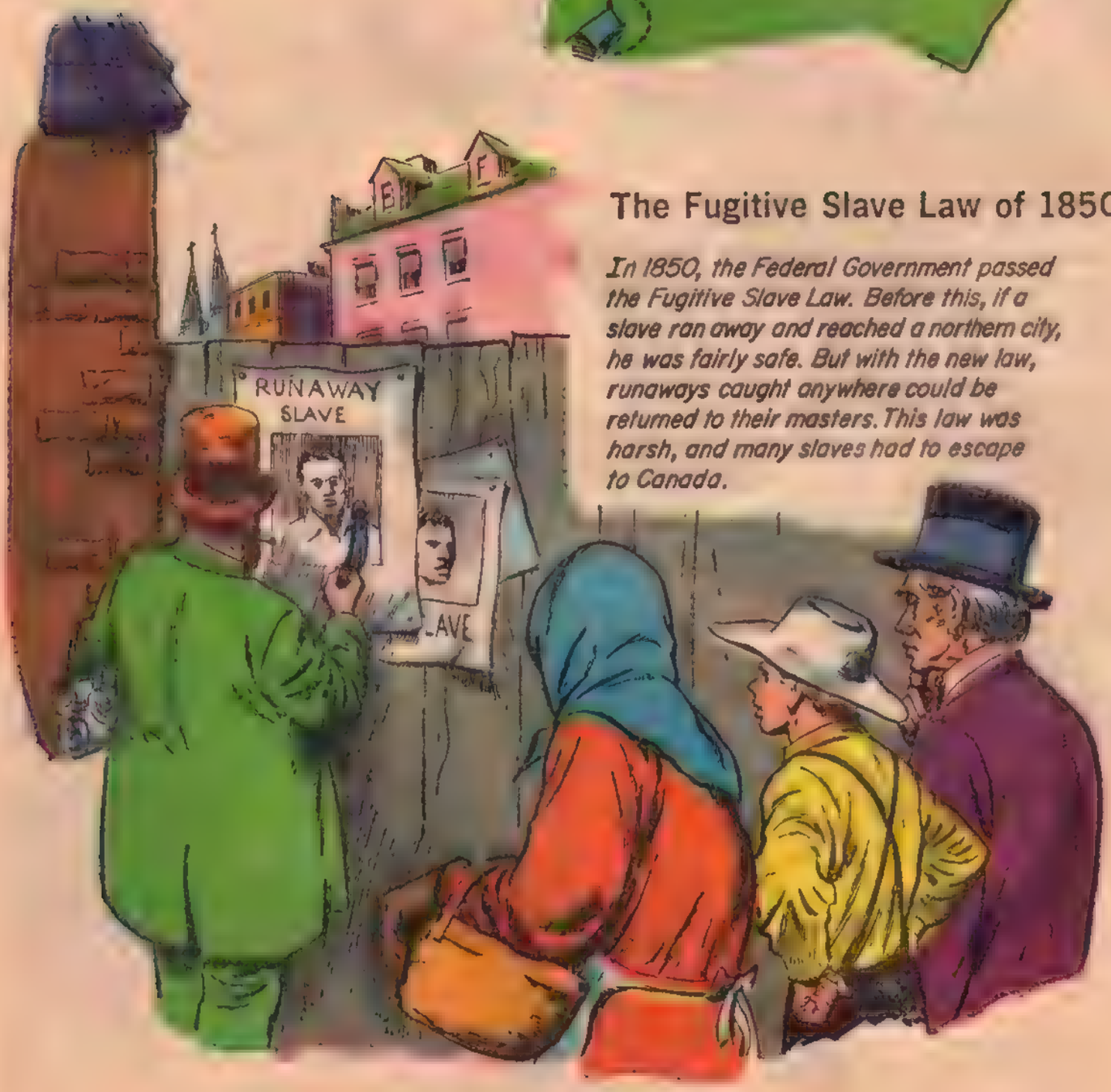
He stayed for a short time, but returned to the roaming life he loved. He died among the Crow Indians in 1866.

The Underground Railroad

For years before the Civil War, many thought that slavery was a great evil. These people were called "abolitionists," and they organized the "Underground Railroad" as a way to help slaves escape. This was not a real railroad, nor was it underground. Homes were used as secret "stations" to hide and feed runaway slaves. Runaways were called "passengers." Those who led the slaves to freedom were called "conductors." Slave owners were always hot on the trail of runaways, and the Underground Railroad was filled with great danger.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850

In 1850, the Federal Government passed the Fugitive Slave Law. Before this, if a slave ran away and reached a northern city, he was fairly safe. But with the new law, runaways caught anywhere could be returned to their masters. This law was harsh, and many slaves had to escape to Canada.



HARRIET TUBMAN

In 1820 or 1821, in a cabin in Maryland, a baby girl was born who was to become the most famous of all Underground Railroad "conductors," Harriet Tubman.

Her girlhood was spent working – she was a slave.

At 24, she married John Tubman – but she could not stop dreaming of freedom. After 5 years . . .

The North Star shone nightly, pointing her way to freedom.

She found the "Underground Railroad."
Can you help me get North?

Soon, in Philadelphia . . .

She worked at anything, poor but free!

My family's still South— I'll get them out somehow.

Through the Underground Railroad, she sent word to be ready. Harriet returned to Baltimore, and...

her career as a "conductor" began that night.

She went South again and again, once bringing her old parents out.

It became harder to go South. The Fugitive Slave Law was passed, but Harriet went on her missions In the cabins, she was known as "Moses."

And "Moses" came . . .
Give this to the child – it'll make him sleep and he won't cry.

Slavecatchers were hot on their trail.

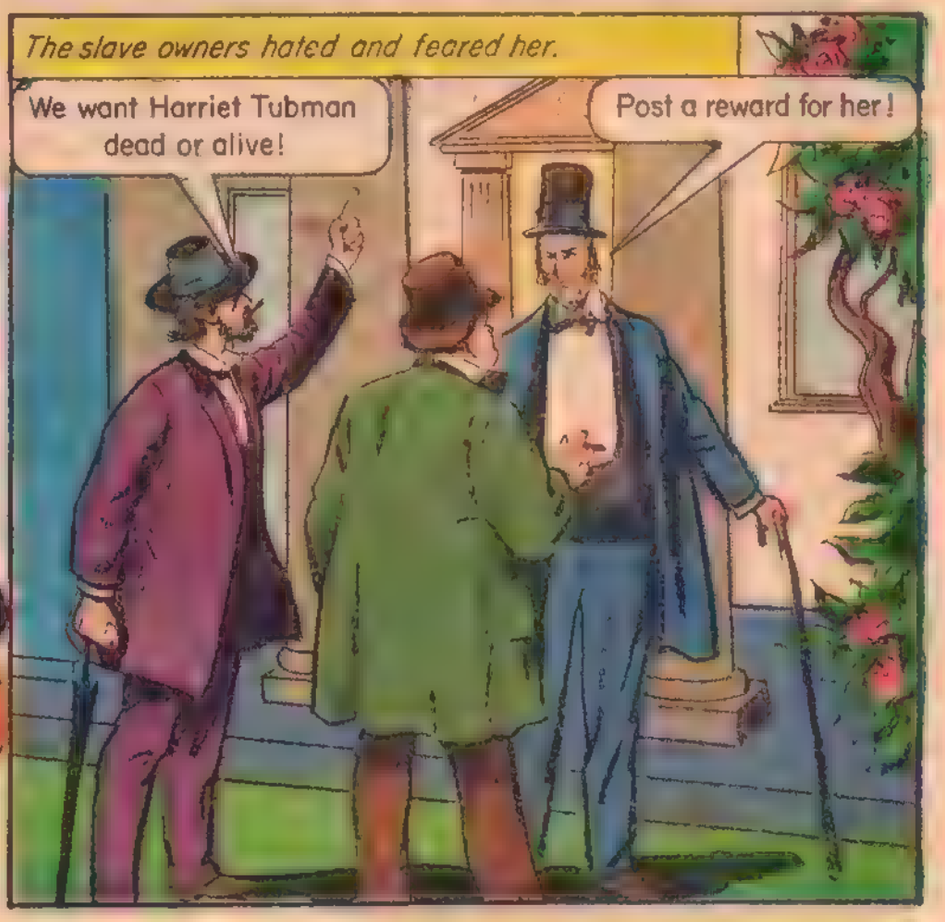
Through swamps, often without food . . .

her desperate little bands struggled North.
We're free!

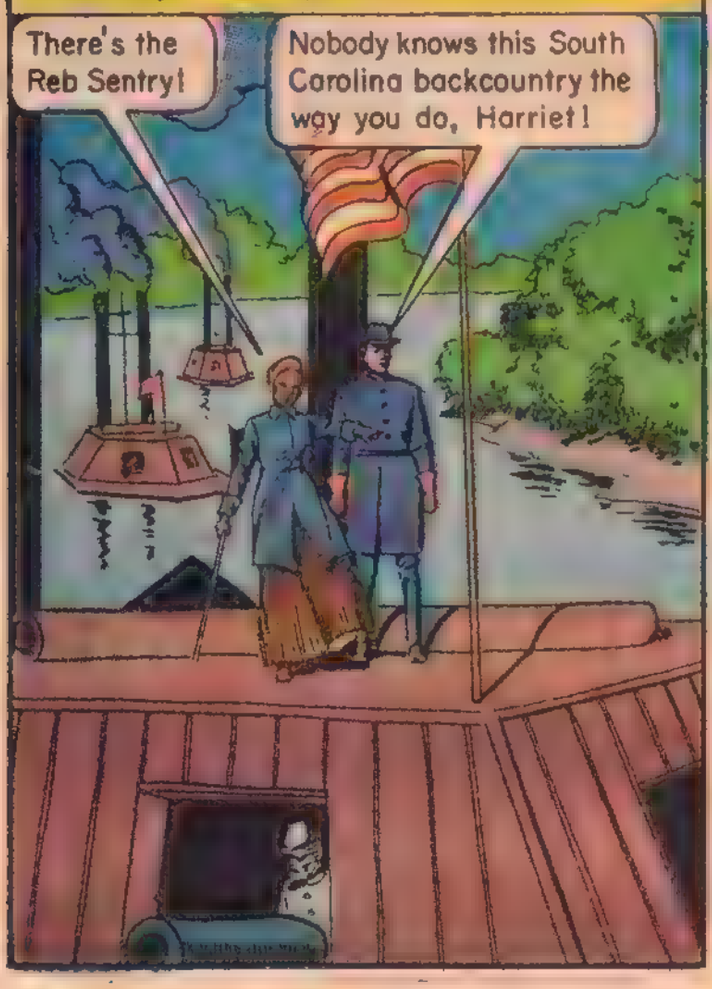
She delivered her people, then went back for more.

Freedom sang in Harriet's soul. She made over 19 trips on the Underground Railroad and rescued over 300 slaves. She was never caught, and never lost a "passenger."

The slave owners hated and feared her.



When the Civil War broke out, Harriet helped the Union Army. In June, 1863 . . .



On that raid, Union forces burned Rebel supplies and escaped with over 700 slaves.

Without pay, she nursed wounded and sick Union soldiers.

God bless you...

In 1865, the war ended. Harriet's people were free. She worked to support her family and friends.

She set up the John Brown Home for people in need.

Harriet was getting old.

In 1913, she died in her home in Auburn, N.Y. A day of tribute was held by the city a few months after her death. The Harriet Tubman plaque still stands at the Courthouse in Auburn.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

* evils

Frederick Douglass was born in Maryland in 1817-a slave. Even as a child, he longed to be his own master.

His master's wife taught him the alphabet - and young Fred taught himself to make out words.

He and 3 others decided to escape.

But the day they were to leave . . .

Douglass was thrown in jail. But on September 3, 1838, he escaped.

Free at last! He married, settled in Massachusetts, and began to go to anti-slavery meetings. One night, he felt he had to speak . . . .

Soon he was traveling in the North, telling what it was like to be a slave.

He's the most wanted runaway slave in America!

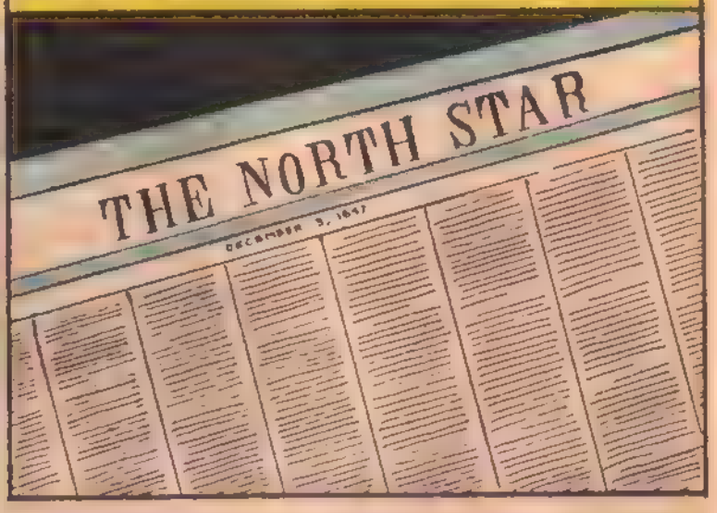
Fearing that he might be captured, Douglass fled to England. But he missed his home.

I am in England, my family are in the United States . . . it seems my duty to go.

But I am legally the property of Thomas Auld, and if I go to the United States, Thomas Auld can seize me... and doom me to unending slavery.

While he was in England, some friends bought his freedom, and Douglass returned home.

Now Douglass was his own master! He set up a newspaper in Rochester, N.Y., telling the world the evils of slavery.



His home was used as an Underground Railroad "station" – over 400 slaves escaped to Canada with his help.

The Civil War broke out – and to Douglass it was a war to end slavery. He enlisted men for the Union Army.

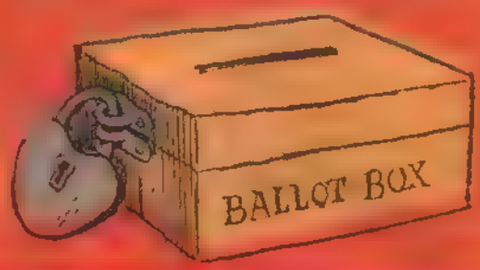
During the war, he spoke often with President Abraham Lincoln.

After the war, Douglass urged the passage of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution. In 1870, it was passed.

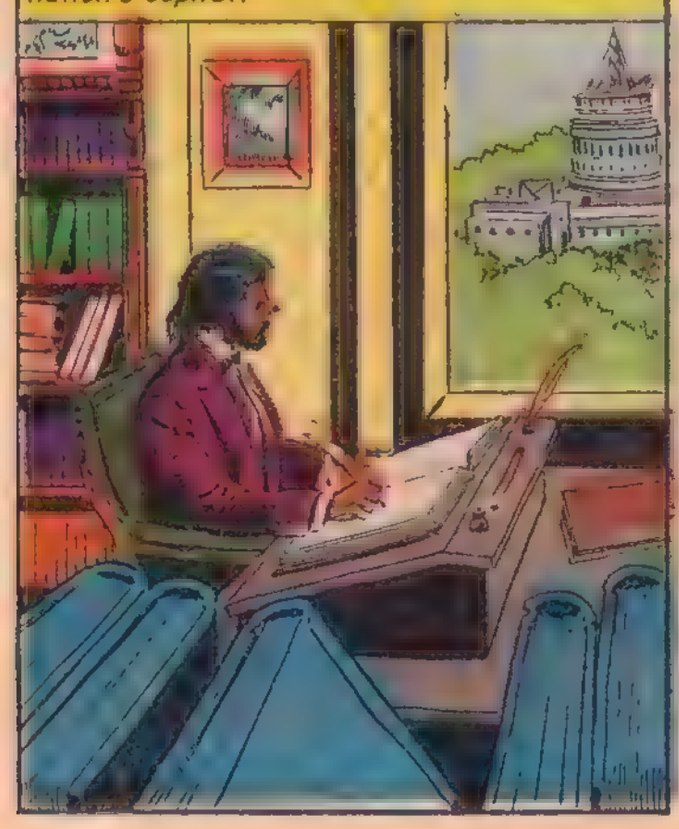
Amendment 15

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.



In 1879, President Hayes named him U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia, and in 1881, he was named Recorder of Deeds for the nation's capital.



Douglass began again to lecture . . .

It is everywhere an accepted truth that in a country, governed by the people, like ours, ***education of the youth*** of all classes is vital to its welfare, prosperity, and to its existence.

In 1889, Douglass was appointed U.S. Minister * to Haiti, a post he kept for 2 years.

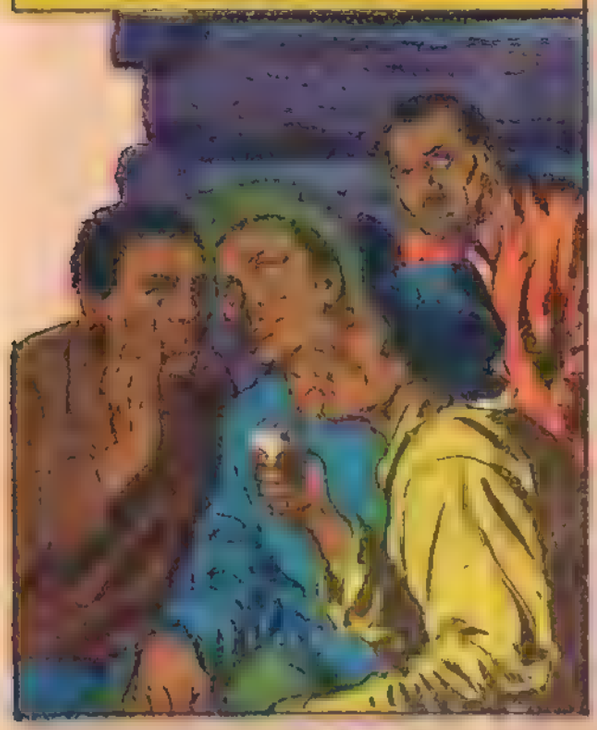
* High government official

A statue of Frederick Douglass stands in Rochester, N.Y.

THE CIVIL WAR

On April 12, 1861, Confederate* troops fired on Fort Sumter near Charleston, S.C., and the Civil War began. It was to last 4 long years. Some 200,000 Negro soldiers fought in the Union Army. Over 37,000 died on battlefields

Slaves set up a spy system for the Union. Harriet Tubman often went South for news from the "grapevine."

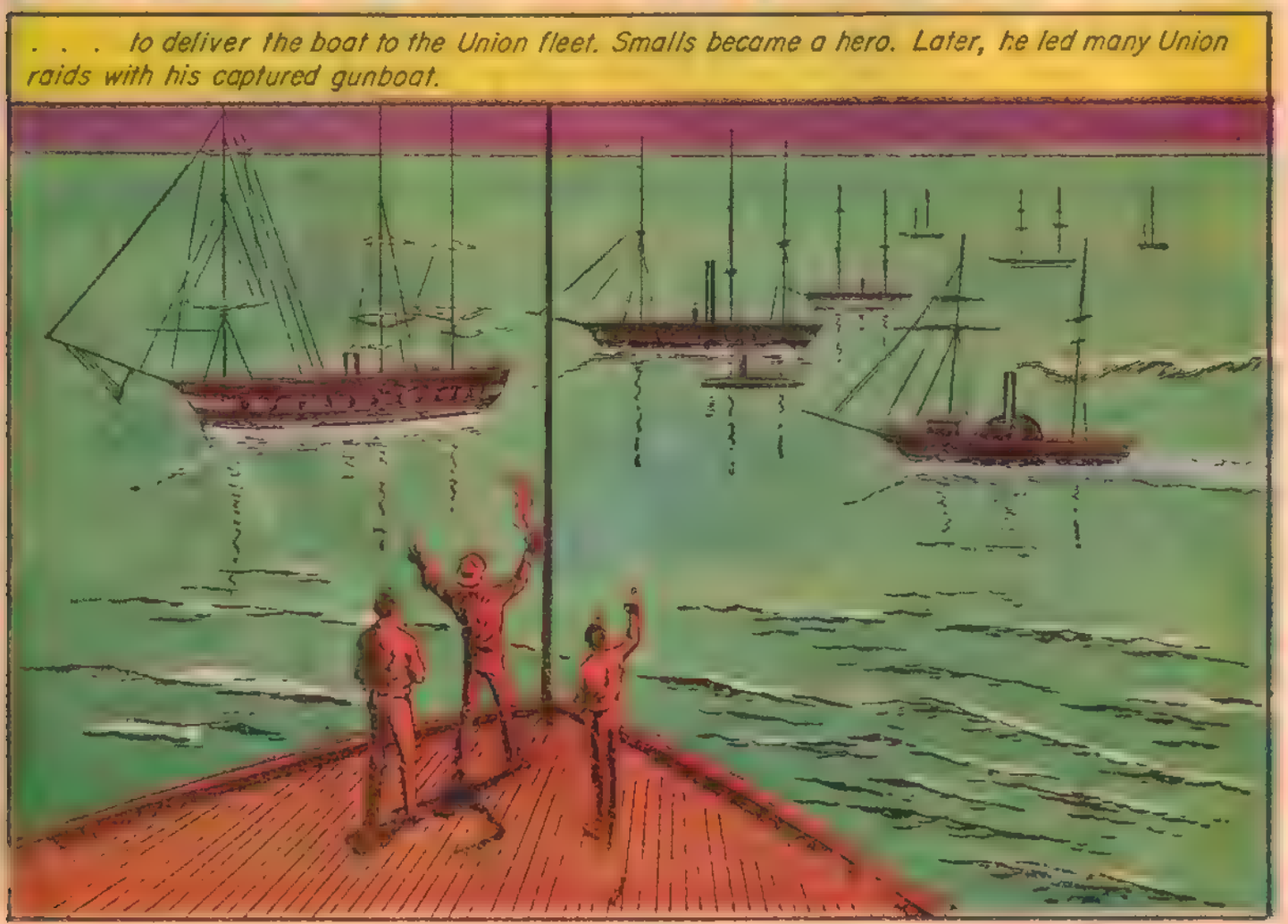


June 6, 1863: Confederate troops surprised a camp of black soldiers at Milliken's Bend, La

Though outnumbered, the black troops charged the enemy and won the battle.

* The Southern army

Civil War · The Heroism of Robert Smalls



Civil War - The Battle of Fort Wagner

July, 1863: The Union Army had to recapture Fort Sumter from the Confederates. To do this, they had to take Fort Wagner first.

The 54th Mass. Regiment, led by Col. Robert Gould Shaw, was picked to lead the attack.

But the Confederate soldiers were alerted!

Col. Shaw was killed immediately. Sergeant Major Lewis Douglass, son of the famous Frederick Douglass, quickly took over.

Another hero, Sergeant William Carney, set the flag waving . . .

. . . guarding it with his life. Later . . . .

It was a losing battle, but the 54th Regiment became famous and was praised by Congress. Sergeant Carney was given a Congressional Medal of Honor.

Today, a monument stands in Boston, honoring the brave men from Massachusetts

In 1865, Martin R. Delaney became the first Negro Major in the history of the United States. He led Union troops in the occupation of Charleston. He was also a famous writer, public speaker, and explorer.

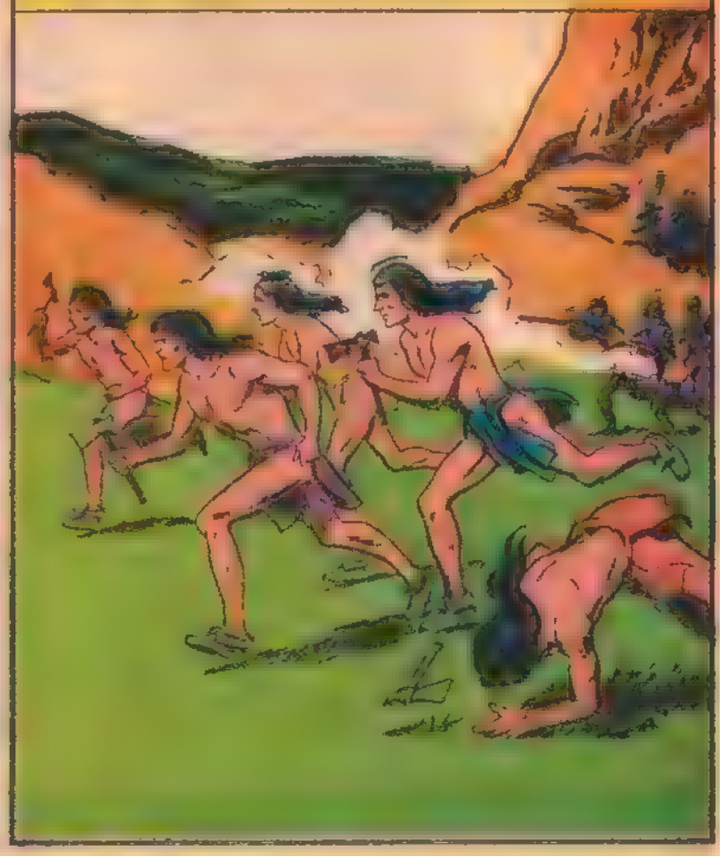
Black Union soldiers fought in hundreds of battles. About 20 were awarded Congressional Medals of Honor by a grateful Federal Government

WINNING THE WILD WEST

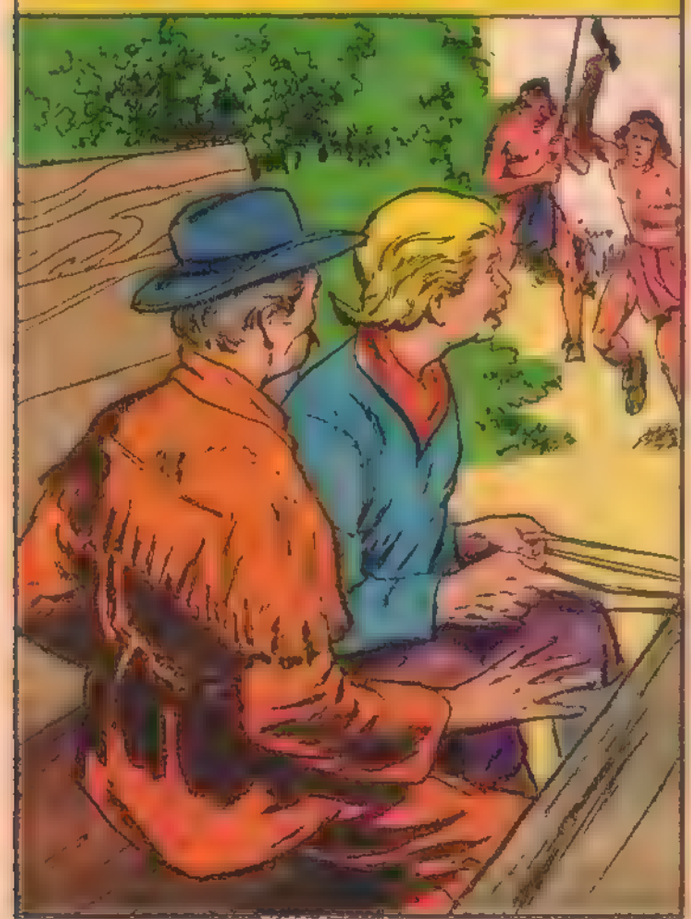
The famous U.S. 10th Cavalry was formed in 1866. Feared by Indians and outlaws, these brave black soldiers protected settlers in the wild frontiers of Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Montana.

Exciting stories are told about them. For example, one day in 1867, Sgt. Charles H. Davis and 8 men were attacked by an Indian war party.

Their bold fighting drove the Indians away . . .



. . . but later, the same Indians attacked 2 settlers.



One settler escaped - the other fought bravely, but he was running out of bullets . . .

. . . when Sgt. Davis and his fighting men arrived in the nick of time!

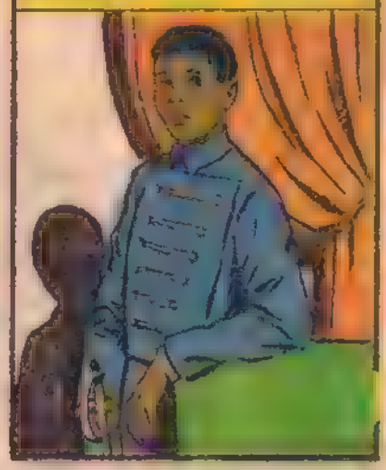
On their way back to camp, Sgt. Davis and his men were ambushed by more Indians.

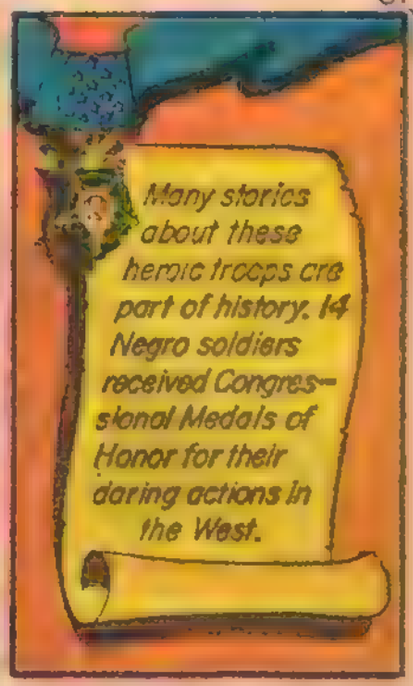
Though outnumbered, the troops opened fire. This frightened the Indian ponies . . .

. . . and the Indians ran. None of Sgt. Davis' men was hurt.

Tracking an Indian war party on the Texas plains, a black cavalry troop went almost four days without water.

In 1877, West Point graduated its first Negro officer, Henry Flipper. Lt. Flipper joined the 10th Cavalry.





Other Kinds of Bravery Also Won the West

Thousands of black settlers poured West after the Civil War. Many became farmers, trappers and scouts. All had to fight the wilderness and savage Indians.

The famous scout, Isaiah Dorman, died at "Custer's Last Stand" in 1876. Some say Dorman was part Indian, because he spoke the Sioux language.

"Deadwood Dick," whose real name was Nat Love, was a badman who rode with outlaw gangs. He was one of the best bronco-busters in the West.

DANIEL HALE WILLIAMS

Daniel Hale Williams was born in Pennsylvania in 1856. His father died when he was 11, and young Dan had to work while he went to school.

As a young man, he worked as a barber in Wisconsin.

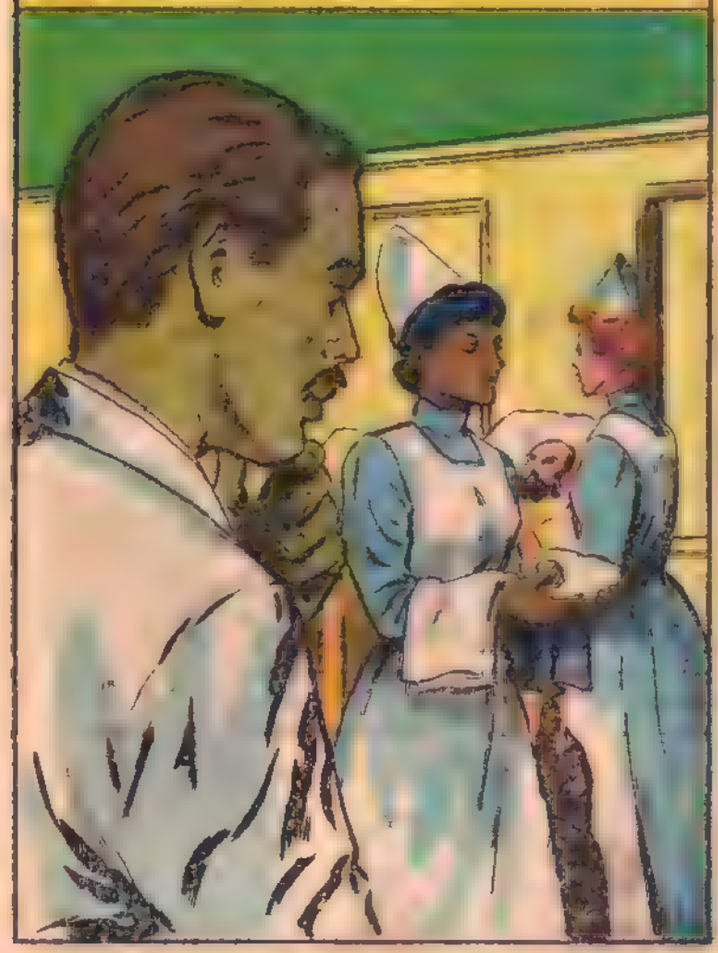
He didn't know what he wanted to do. For a while he studied law.

The famous Dr. Henry Palmer took Dan as a student. Then Dan went to medical school at Northwestern University. He graduated in 1883.

The new "Dr. Williams" opened an office in Chicago. Times were hard, and patients were few

Between 1883 and 1885, most of his work was done in his patients' homes.

In 1885, he went to work at Chicago's South Side Dispensary. Dr. Williams saw few black doctors and nurses there.



Dr. Williams saw the need for a hospital for sick people of all races. He began to speak at meetings to raise money.

He collected money bit by bit, and in 1891, Provident Hospital was opened.

In 1892, Dr. Williams opened the first school for black nurses at Provident Hospital.

One day in 1893, a young black man named James Cornish was carried in . . .

Doctor, he's been stabbed in the chest!

Cornish was sinking fast.

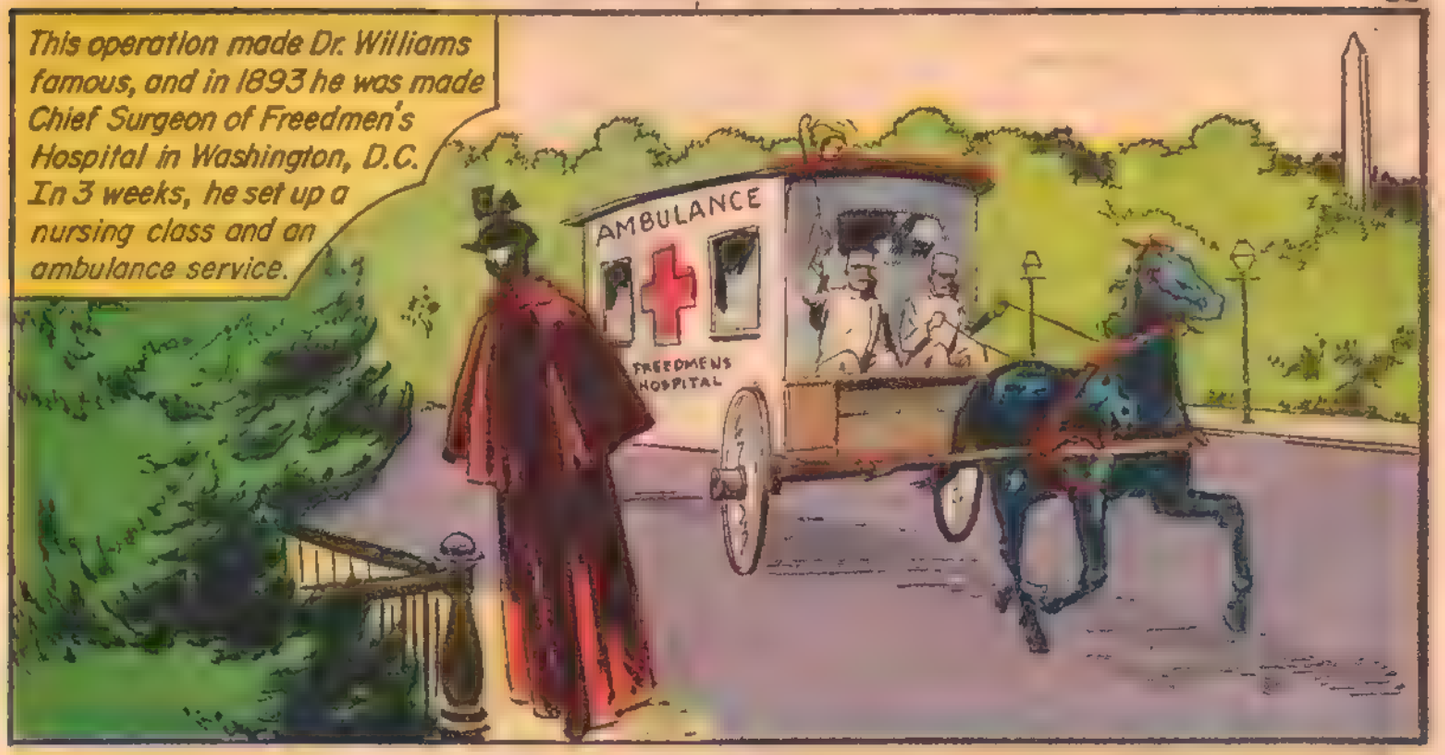
Dr. Williams found that Cornish's heart had been cut.

If I don't operate quickly, he'll die...

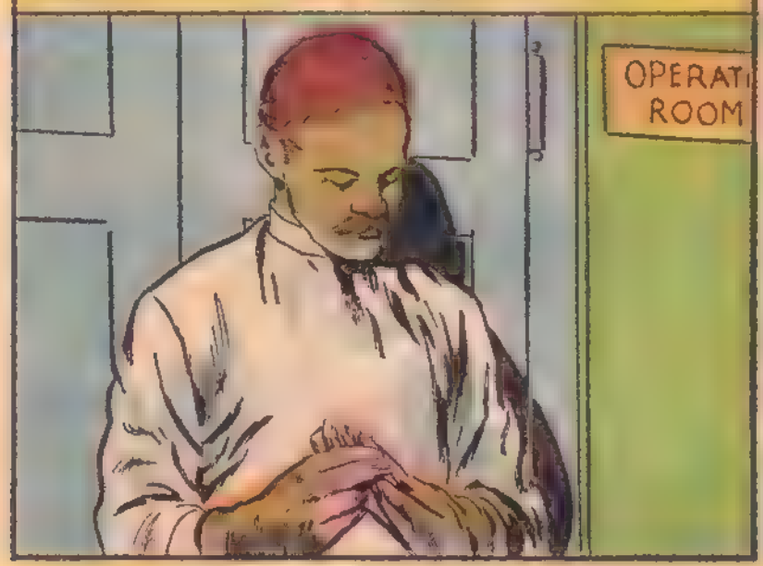
No one had ever operated successfully on a human heart before . . .

The operation was a success! Cornish lived for more than 20 years after.

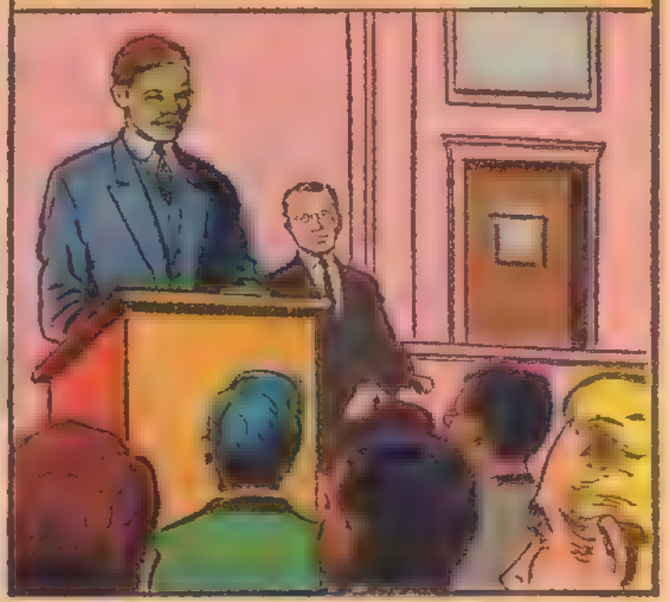
This operation made Dr. Williams famous, and in 1893 he was made Chief Surgeon of Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C. In 3 weeks, he set up a nursing class and an ambulance service.



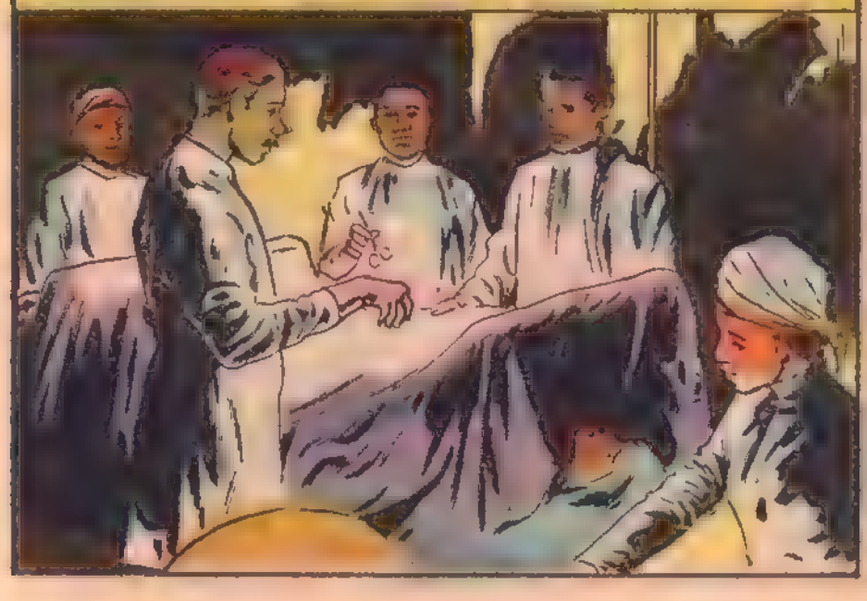
Dr. Williams amazed the world with his skill - in over 500 operations, only 8 patients died. His new surgical methods blazed new paths in medicine.



Very soon he became one of the first members of the American College of Surgeons.



In 1900, he set up a Surgical Clinic at Meharry Medical College, Tennessee.

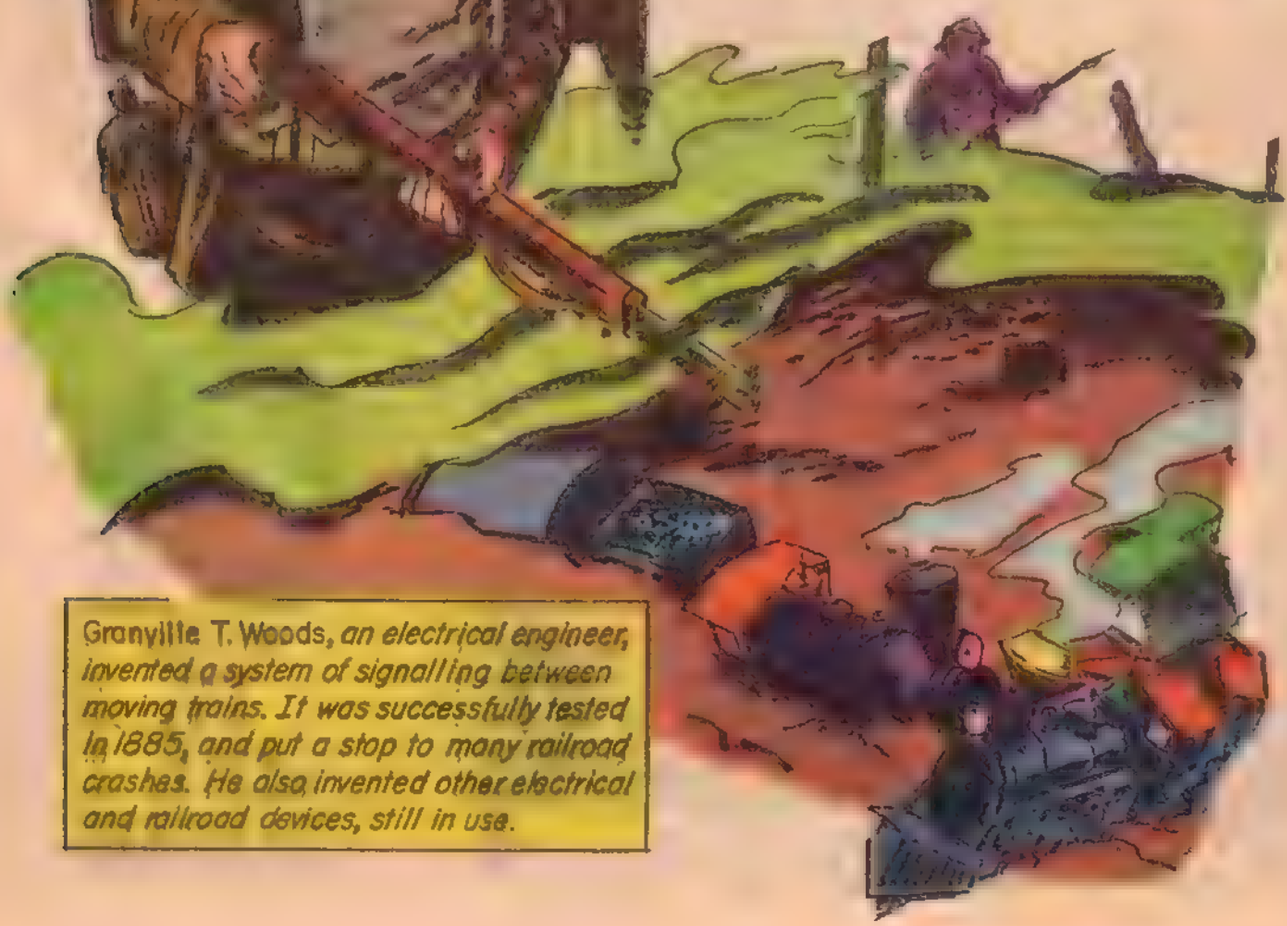


When Dr. Daniel Hale Williams died in 1931, the world mourned a great medical pioneer.

INVENTORS

In 1872, Elijah McCoy invented a system to oil machines while they were operating. People started to call his system "The Real McCoy" because many others tried to imitate it. This very important system is still in use.

The gas mask and traffic light were invented by Garrett A. Morgan (1877-1963). In 1916, Morgan put on his gas mask and entered a 200-foot tunnel to save the lives of many men trapped by an explosion. This gas mask was used by American troops in World War I. Morgan also invented the electric stop light, which controls traffic and has saved countless lives.



Granville T. Woods, an electrical engineer, invented a system of signalling between moving trains. It was successfully tested in 1885, and put a stop to many railroad crashes. He also invented other electrical and railroad devices, still in use.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Booker Taliaferro Washington rose from slavery to become a world famous leader, educator, and public speaker.

He was born in 1858 or 1859 in Virginia. After the Civil War, his family, freed from slavery, moved to West Virginia. Young Booker worked in a coal mine.

He wanted to learn, and studied at night school.

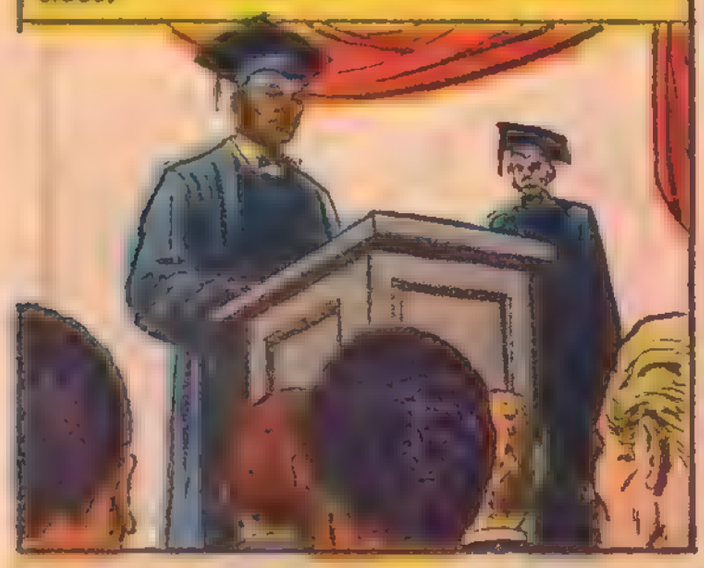
One day he heard some talk about Hampton Institute, a school in Virginia.

Hampton must be the greatest place on earth . . . . I must get there.

In 1872, he set out for Hampton.

To earn his keep at school, Booker worked as a janitor.

In June, 1875, he graduated at the top of his class.

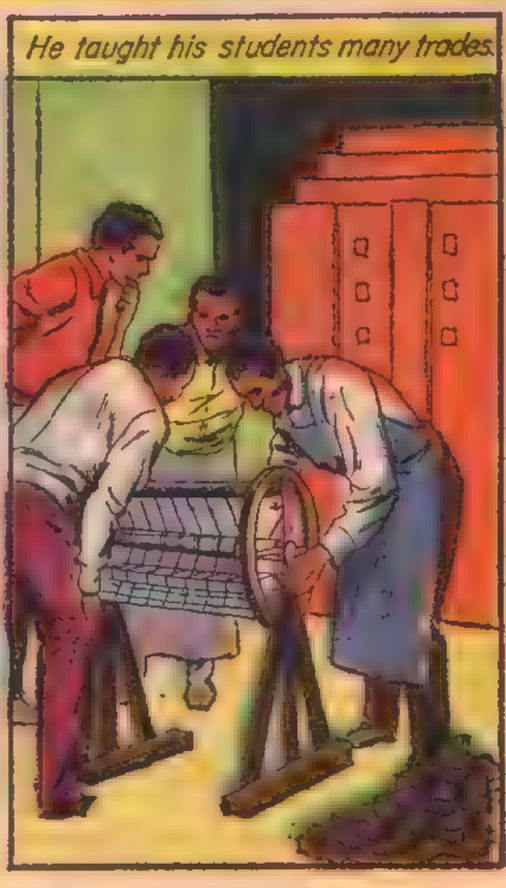


For a few years, he was a teacher.

In 1881, Washington was asked to start a new school in Tuskegee, Alabama. His first classroom was in a shack.

Soon, he led his students to clear farmland for the school.

He taught his students many trades.



To raise money for Tuskegee, Washington began to speak in public.

Any individual who learned to do something better than anybody else . . . has solved his problem, regardless of the color of his skin.

Tuskegee Institute grew . . . soon 40 buildings were built, mostly by the students themselves.

It means a great deal, I think, to start off on a foundation which one has made for oneself.

In 1895, in Atlanta, he gave the speech that made him world-famous.

No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.

President Grover Cleveland wrote to Washington about that speech.

For the rest of his life, Booker T. Washington spoke of the importance of education and work. He died in 1915. In 1957, the Booker T. Washington National Monument was established in Hardy, Virginia.

This statue of Booker T. Washington is at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

George Washington Carver was born of slave parents in 1860. His mother was kidnapped when he was a baby, and George never saw her again. He grew up on Moses Carver's small Missouri farm and was called "Carver's George."

Young George loved nature. He often walked in the woods and collected rocks and plants.

For a time he went to school in nearby Neosho.

George wanted to learn, and later went to high school in Minneapolis, Kansas. He washed laundry to support himself.

He changed his name to "George Washington Carver."

For a few years, he worked at odd jobs, saving his money. Then he bought his own small farm.

When Carver was almost 30 he went to Simpson College, Iowa, to study art.

But Carver wanted to grow things. He decided to study botany* and farming at Iowa State College. He continued to earn money by working wherever he could.

*the study of plants

Carver graduated in 1894, and stayed at the school as a teacher. He earned a masters degree 2 years later.

In 1896, Booker T. Washington wrote to Dr. Carver and asked him to come to Tuskegee Institute. Dr. Carver accepted and wrote . . .

It has always been the one great ideal of my life to be of the greatest good to the greatest number of my people possible, and to this end I have been preparing myself for these many years.

Southern farmers had grown tobacco and cotton. Now the cotton crop was failing. Dr. Carver decided to help the farmers by showing that other crops could be grown as well.

He began to test in his Tuskegee Laboratory, and planted test crops.

Dr. Carver worked day and night at his tests..

At first, the farmers wondered . . .

He says we can grow peanuts instead of cotton.

Peanuts - what can anybody do with peanuts?

Dr. Carver found over 300 uses for peanuts, and showed farmers it was worth growing them.

He found new uses for many vegetables, and showed farmers how to grow larger crops.

You must plow deeper and use fertilizer.

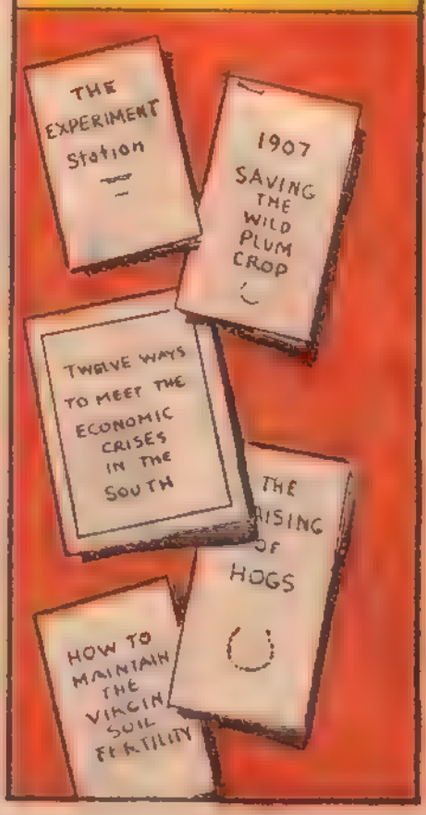
He began to travel throughout the South, helping all farmers.

Dr. Carver gained world-wide fame for his research, and won many awards and medals. He was a modest man, and said his ideas came from God.

Once, Dr. Carver was called to Congress to give a 15-minute talk about his work. The Congressmen became so interested that he answered their questions for hours.

Famous people from all over the world came to study with Dr. Carver.

His findings were published.



When Dr. Carver died on January 5, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt led the nation in mourning for the man who had saved the farming system of the South.

In 1951, the Federal Government set up the George Washington Carver National Monument at Diamond, Missouri. This statue, named "The Boy Carver," is at the monument.

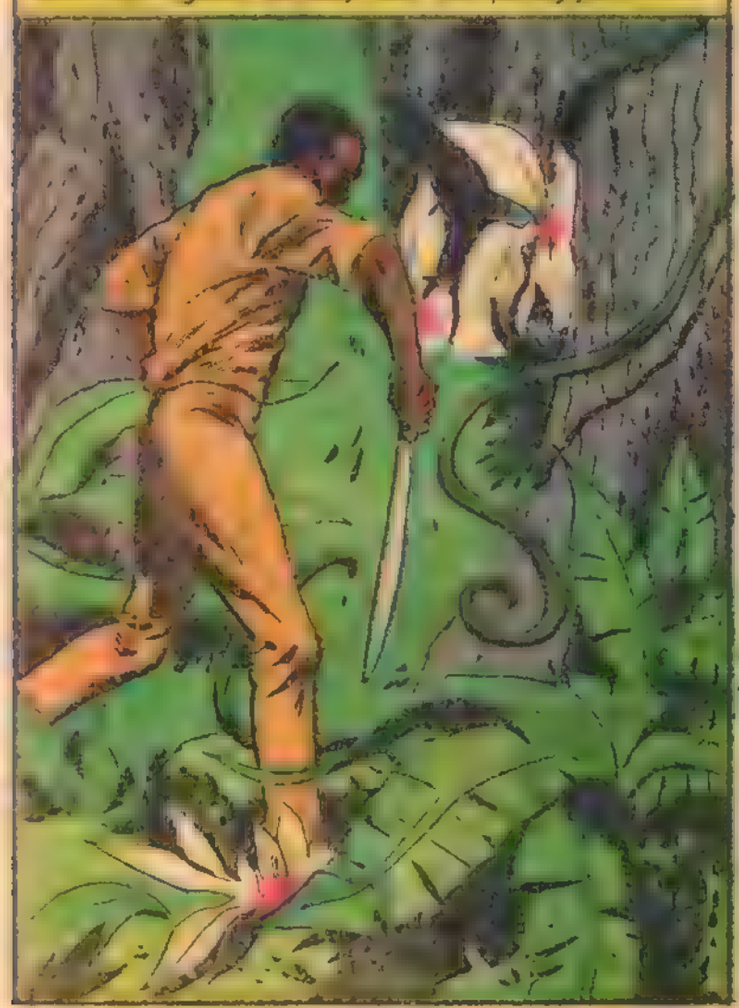
MATTHEW HENSON

Matthew Henson was born in 1866 in Maryland. When he was 12 years old, he ran away from his step-mother. He signed up as cabin boy on the ship, Katie Hines.

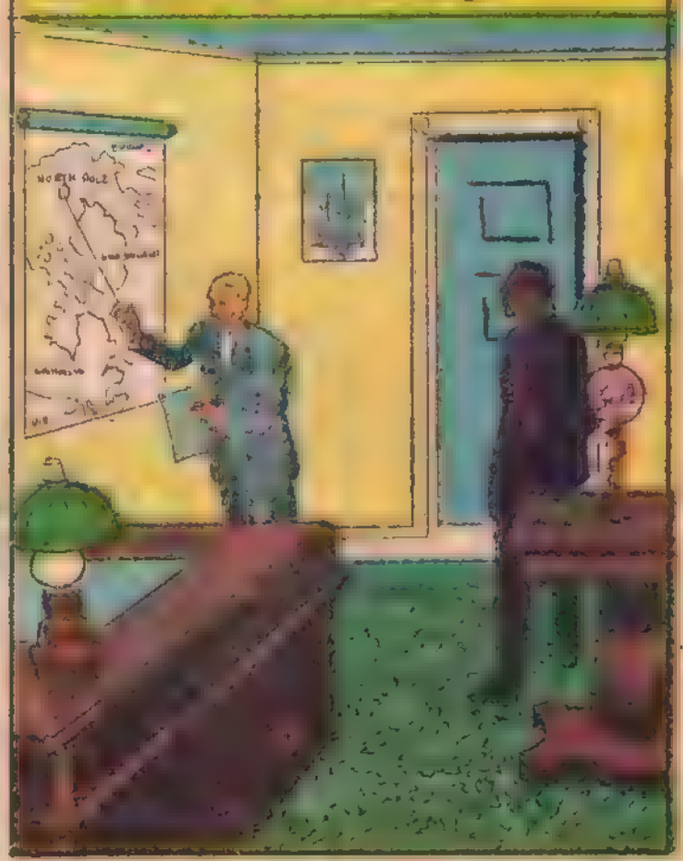
The Captain took an interest in young Matt and taught him to read and write. Five years later, the Captain died, and Matt left the sea.

Matt got a job in a hat store in Washington, D.C. In 1887, a young navy officer named Robert Peary came in to buy a hat. Peary liked Matt, and asked him to work for him on an expedition to Nicaragua.

Matt was a good worker, and was quickly promoted.



Peary's lifetime goal was to explore the North Pole, that frozen, undiscovered area at the top of the world. In 1891, Peary set up a trip to Greenland to try to find a route to the North Pole. He asked Matt to come along.



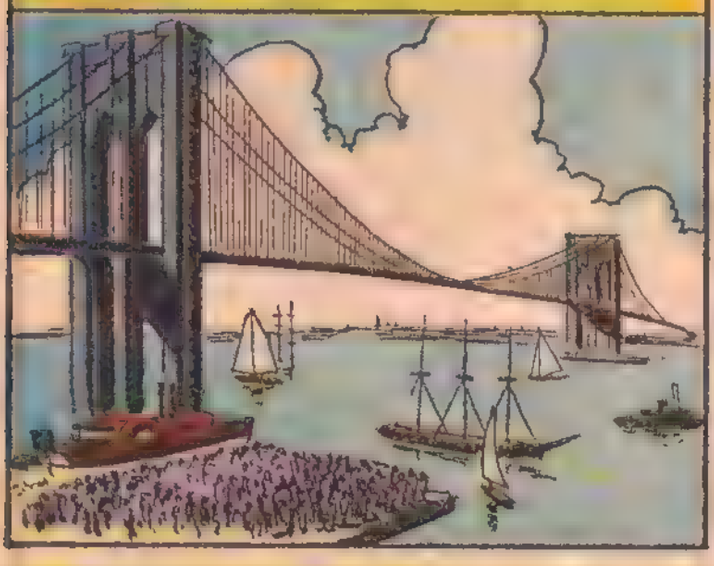
In Greenland, Matt set up base. He built a house and met the Eskimos.*

* natives of the arctic.

Soon Matt could speak the Eskimo language. During that first long winter, the Eskimos taught Matt to hunt, drive a dog team, and build igloos.*

* Ice houses in which Eskimos live.

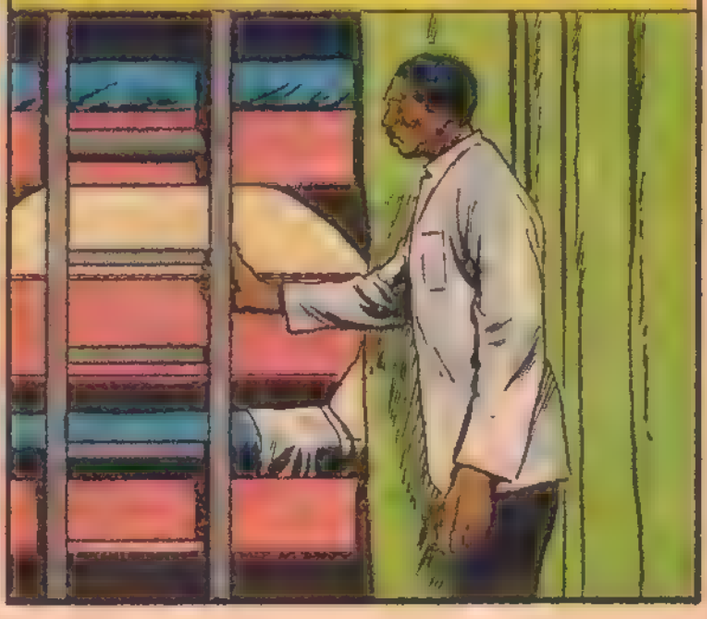
After a year of hardship, they finally crossed Greenland. Peary and Matt returned to New York as heroes!



In 1895, Peary and Matt returned to Greenland and continued their search for a route to the Pole. Raging storms beat them back, and they returned to the United States.

In 1898, they tried again to find a route to the Pole. Again, they failed. Peary almost froze to death. The Eskimos wanted to leave him behind – but Matt would not desert his friend.

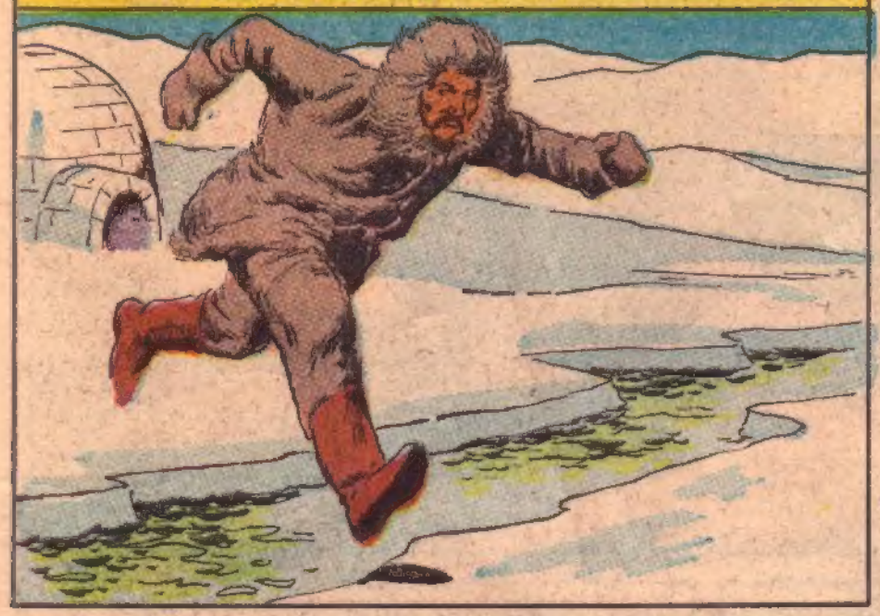
2 more tries also failed, and Peary returned to the United States. Matt became a Pullman Porter.



In July, 1905, Peary tried again. He called for Matt, and they sailed on a ship especially built to fight the ice-covered seas. Almost 3 months later, the ship put them down at their winter base, 500 miles from the Pole.

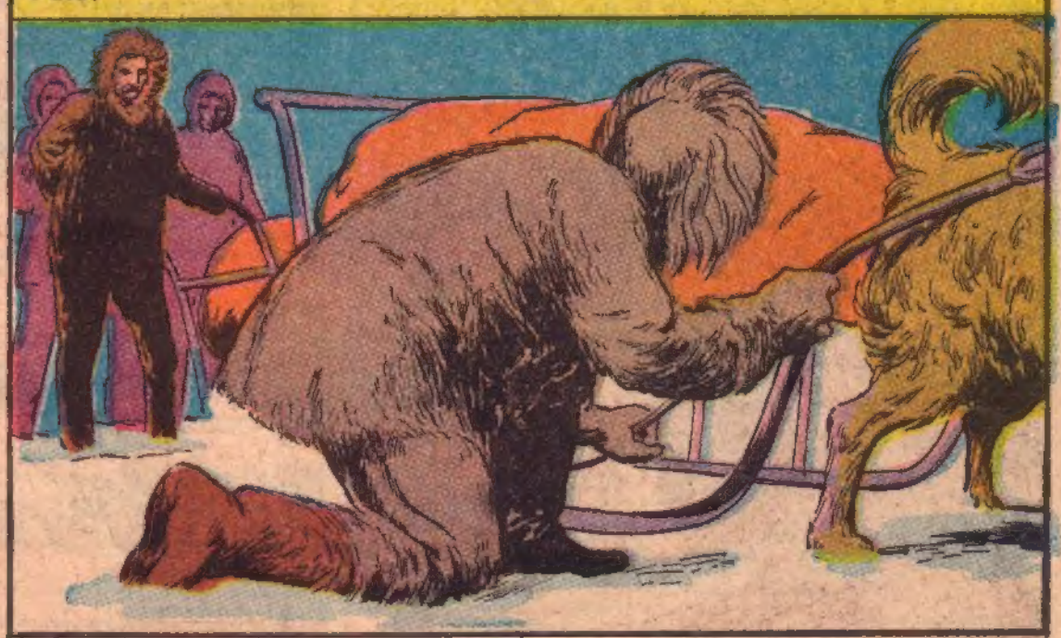
In March, 1906, they started sledding north. At the end of the 8th day, the ice split.

Matt leapt across the widening sea . . .

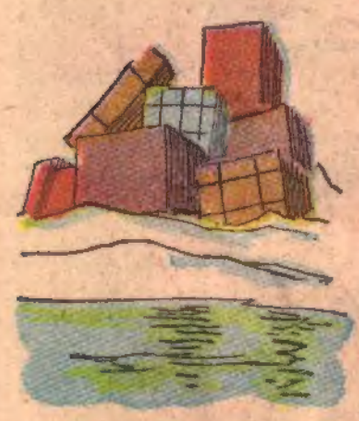


. . . and brought the dogs back.

2 years later, in 1908, Peary started his one last attempt to reach the North Pole.



Their supplies gone, Peary and Matt turned back — but nobody had ever been further north!



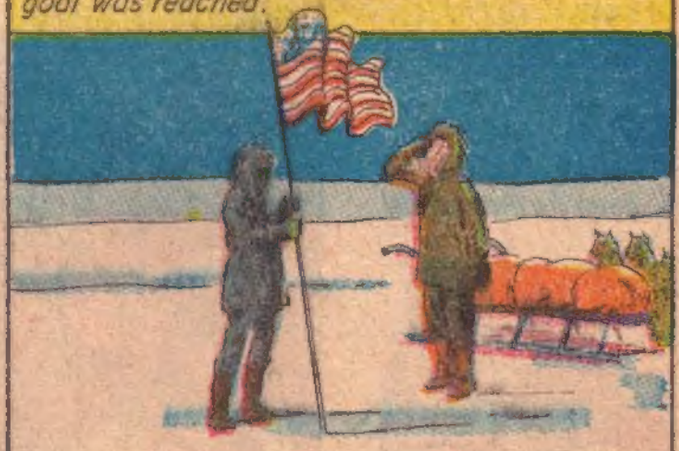
Again, they pushed north. But nature stopped them – the ice split and open sea lay in their path. For 6 days, Peary and Matt waited for the sea to freeze so they could cross.

Slowly they sledded over the dangerous ice, fighting howling winds at every step. Only miles from the Pole . . .

. . . . . an Eskimo pulled Matt out of the freezing water.

His clothes froze in the below-zero weather, but Matt did not stop to change – their goal was in sight!

April 7, 1909 – the North Pole at last! Matt planted the American flag in the ice – their goal was reached.



18 years of fighting ice and blizzards passed before Robert Peary and Matthew Henson stood at the top of the world – the first men to reach the North Pole.

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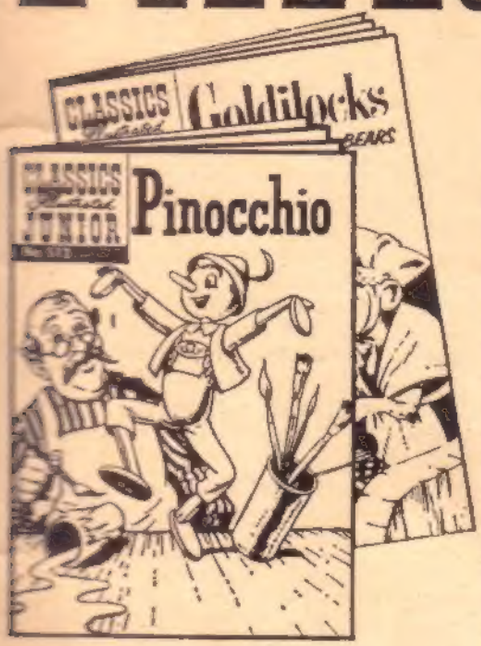

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